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150,000 Cables a Month

NSA Dwarfed CIA On Reading Messages

By Norman Kempster

Washington Star Staff Writer

Every month in recent years, employees of the National Security Agency analyzed an average of 150,000 intercepted telegrams — reviewing 10 times as many purloined messages every 30 days as CIA operatives read during the entire 20 years of a controversial program of opening mail.

According to evidence collected by the Senate Intelligence Committee, the NSA obtained copies of overseas cables from the nation's three international telegraph companies in a program which appears to be both illegal and highly secret.

The report on NSA's 23-year working agreement with RCA Global Communications, ITT World Communications and Western Union International came amid a flurry of developments in the parallel investigations of the Senate and House Intelligence Committees:

- Rep. Otis G. Pike, D-N.Y., chairman of the House committee, said his panel has established that the CIA leadership objected to parts of a covert plan to undermine the government of Marxist President Salvadore Allende in Chile, but former President Richard M. Nixon and Secretary of

State Henry A. Kissinger ordered the agency to proceed.

- CIA Director William E. Colby told the House committee that, although the agency no longer employs as agents staff members of major U.S. publications or broadcast networks, some full-time overseas agents are posing as free-lance writers.

- An internal CIA document showed that a ranking CIA employee, detailed to the White House as an expert on Vietnam, wrote speeches for then President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 re-election campaign and helped write a Democratic "fact book" for use in that contest.

- The House committee subpoenaed U.S. intelligence reports in an effort to find out if estimates of Soviet nuclear strength have been distorted to support one side or the other in the Ford administration's high-level debate over detente policy.

The NSA program remained a secret longer than the CIA's mail-opening project. The Rockefeller Commission revealed last June that between 1953 and 1973 CIA agents opened selected letters between the United States and Communist countries. The CIA said later a total of about 15,000 letters were opened in the 20 years.

Chairman Frank Church, D-Idaho, of the Senate committee, made public the evidence of the NSA's link with the cable companies in spite of the heated opposition of three members of the 11-man committee who argued that the matter should remain secret.

It was understood that critics of releasing the information were concerned about the impact the massive size of the operation might have on the public.

CHURCH SAID the program — code-named Operation Shamrock — lasted from 1947 until it was terminated by since-fired Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger last May 15.

Church said the operation, which gave the NSA access to virtually every international cable sent through facilities in the United States, seems to violate both the federal communications laws and the 4th Amendment.

Atty. Gen. Edward Levi said that he does not know if NSA operations are illegal because he does not know exactly what the agency is doing. He said President Ford has instructed the NSA to provide information on its activities to the Justice Department.

"Until you have it, you don't have the foggiest idea whether what they are doing is legal or illegal," Church remarked.

"I COULD say I have a foggy idea," Levi said.

Levi told the committee that the 4th Amendment apparently was never intended to protect "foreign nations, their agents and collaborators."

Church said the NSA's cable intercept operation included only messages to or from foreign countries. But he said there was little doubt that the cables of American citizens were regularly monitored.

"Telegrams to or from or even mentioning United States citizens whose names appeared on the watch list in the late 1960s and early 1970s would have been sent to NSA analysts and many would subsequently be disseminated to other agencies," Church said.

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